

HERSETH SANDLIN DISCUSSES AIR FORCE, AIR GUARD ISSUES WITH HEAD OF AIR COMBAT COMMAND

Washington, DC- Today, Rep. Herseth Sandlin met with the head of Air Combat Command General William Fraser. Air Combat Command (ACC) is the command structure for both the F-16s of the South Dakota Air Guard at Joe Foss Field and the B-1s at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

“I appreciated having the opportunity to meet with General Fraser to discuss priorities and concerns related to the missions at Joe Foss Field and Ellsworth,” Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. “I look forward to ongoing discussions about ways in which Congress can work with the Administration, our nation’s military leaders, and our commanders at Ellsworth and Joe Foss Field to capitalize on the unique strengths of these sites to improve our nation’s strategic defense.”

During today’s meeting, Rep. Herseth Sandlin raised questions related to the recently announced delays in the F-35 program and what steps the Air Force will take to ensure our nation’s present force of bombers and fighters, such as the F-16s and B-1s, will be able to meet our nation’s security needs in the next decade.

“It is important to continue to invest in platforms such as the B-1 and F-16 in order to maintain our nation’s military edge,” Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. “I was pleased to hear that Gen. Fraser agrees with this assessment. I look forward to working with him and my colleagues in Congress to accomplish this important goal.”

Fraser told Rep. Herseth Sandlin that one of his chief goals is ensuring ACC’s training priorities properly prepare units to meet our nation’s current war-fighting needs.

Last year, Joe Foss Field scored in the top third of all potential bases in the initial decision process for F-35 bases. Further underscoring the strength of Joe Foss Field as a potential candidate for mission growth, the National Guard Bureau announced last week that the South Dakota Air Guard will receive Block 40 F-16s in the coming months in order to replace the older Block 30 planes the 114th Fighter Wing is currently flying. The new planes have a longer lifespan and are not scheduled to be retired until 2020-22, compared to 2017-18 for the 114th Fighter Wing’s current planes.

Rep. Herseth Sandlin said, “The score Joe Foss Field received last year, along with the well-deserved announcement of new F-16s demonstrates that the 114th Fighter Wing is a critical component of our national security and a strong candidate for a future F-35 mission. General Fraser is a strong believer in the value of the Air National Guard and the role they play in our nation’s armed services.”

Also today, Rep. Herseth Sandlin discussed with General Fraser today the possibility of an active association, which is a training and personnel partnership between a regular Air Force unit and a reserve component unit such as the Air Guard. Usually, the regular Air Force unit will send personnel as needed to stay and work with the reserve unit, taking advantage of the strengths of both units. In general, reserve units have primary responsibility for the aircraft and

share them with active-duty units. Rep. Herseith Sandlin added, “Ultimately, an active association between the South Dakota Air Guard at Joe Foss Field and an active unit would multiply the training investment by combining the best parts of both units.”

Rep. Herseith Sandlin also emphasized to General Fraser the continued need to sustain and modernize the B-1 fleet – especially in light of the recent delays to the next-generation bomber and F-35 programs. Last summer, Rep. Herseith Sandlin met with General Norton Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and also stressed to him the importance of the B-1 as our nation’s workhorse bomber.

Although the B-1 has flown over 7,000 combat sorties since September 11, far more than any other plane in our nation’s arsenal, the Pentagon has proposed spending \$845 million from FY11 through FY15 on the B-1, a smaller amount than was recommended for other aircraft such as the B-52 and B-2.

“Given the success of the B-1, along with the timetable for development of the next-generation bomber, I have concerns with the proposed funding levels for the B-1 platform,” Rep. Herseith Sandlin said. “I believe it is critical that we appropriate the necessary funds for the B-1 to modernize and maintain the platform as it will need to continue to serve as our nation’s primary bomber into the next decade.”

Another topic Rep. Herseith Sandlin discussed with General Fraser was the role of the proposed expansion of the Powder River Training Complex and how the ACC views this expansion as part of Ellsworth’s future. The draft Environmental Impact Study for the proposed expansion is expected late this spring or early this summer. Rep. Herseith Sandlin said, “As the Powder River Training Complex is a key priority for Ellsworth, it’s critical that this expansion stay on schedule.”

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